

REVIVAL

By Sondra de Helen

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by
Sandra de Helen

CAST: one female

“Praise God!”, Grandma is shouting. I’d be embarrassed except that everyone else seems to be shouting, too.

Reverend Fuller has us at fever pitch with his sermon on God’s precious love. This is the last night of a seven-day revival meeting. Every evening after supper, we clean up the kitchen and ourselves, pick up our Bibles and our coins wrapped in hankies, and we climb the hot dusty hill to church.

It’s a mile and a half up the Missouri limestone gravel road, but it’s also thirty minutes of talking to Grandma and Grandpa without being told to do some chore. We talk about who’ll be at the revival meeting, or what Reverend Fuller’ll preach about tonight, or who got saved the night before.

“Grandma, Grandpa, hurry up!” I try to drag them up the hill. I’m excited tonight, as I’m going to sing a solo, and there’s nothing I like better than singing in church — especially by myself. Back home with my mom and sister and step-father, I sing in our conventional, conservative, First Christian Church about once a month. In fact, singing has become my reason for attending church at all, since I got mad at God for taking my daddy to heaven.

Grandma shushes me. Grandpa smiles indulgently. “What’s your hurry, Sis?”

“Oh, Grandpa, I like your church. I like how everybody claps for the singing.”

He chuckles. Grandma says, “Land, Child, I don’t know why you ain’t nervous.”

“Singing don’t make me nervous, Grandma, singing makes me feel, um, I don’t know what. Not nervous, though.”

The tiny church fills up quickly even though we’re among the first to arrive. Like everyone else, we find our usual seats, pull a cardboard fan from the hymnal rack and begin to create a breeze.

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Reverend Fuller soon gets us started with a few words. Then we sing some hymns and pray awhile. I'm impatient for my turn at getting the attention. At last he calls on me. "Diana May, will you let us hear your voice tonight?"

"Yes, Rev." The crowd titters, and Grandma gives her head a little shake. I should have said his full name, I guess. I go to the piano and take my place and whisper the title of my selection to Mrs. Bellows, the accompanist. Then I smooth the white cotton pique skirt of my dress, lift my chin, and give the nod.

For those few glorious moments, I am a gift from heaven. My voice pours out like heated honey, and the sound seems to surround the entire congregation. The high notes dance in my own ears and make my stomach feel full and happy. I have no fear. I look up into smiling faces and wish the song would never have to end.

I can feel the love in this damp, humid room, smell it amidst the aftershave, toilet water, and healthy sweat. I feel lifted, and my voice rings out with no effort from me.

As the song comes to its end, the congregation applauds. Grandpa beams a broad smile, Grandma coughs into her hankie. The applause doesn't die. I stand there next to the upright piano, wiggling my toes in pleasure, waiting to take my modified curtsy.

Then Reverend Fuller's voice booms out above the clapping. "Diana, I believe we want you to sing it again. Can you do that for us?"

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